

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Pertussis (whooping cough) can be a serious illness, especially in young, unimmunized children.

CAUSE: *Bordetella pertussis*, a bacterium

SYMPTOMS: The first symptoms of pertussis are like those of a common cold, such as a runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever, and a mild cough. After a week or two a persistent cough develops which occurs in explosive bursts, sometimes ending with a high-pitched whoop and vomiting. Between bursts of coughing, the child appears well. Coughing attacks may continue up to 10 weeks and are more common at night. Pertussis is frequently complicated by pneumonia and ear infections, particularly in infants. Pertussis is the most severe during the first year of life. Death from pertussis is rare, but does occur.

TRANSMISSION: By droplets that are expelled during sneezing and coughing.

INCUBATION: It takes 6 to 20 days, usually 9 to 10 days from the time a person is exposed until symptoms develop.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD: Varies depending on the immunization status of the person. It begins at the time of early cold-like symptoms and is contagious until five days after antibiotic treatment begins.



EXCLUSION

Until 5 days after antibiotic treatment begins and is well enough to participate in normal daily activities.



REPORTABLE

PROVIDER: This disease is reportable to the health department. In Hall, Hamilton, or Merrick County call (308) 385-5175. Outside counties call your local or state health department

SCHOOL/CHILD CARE FACILITY: Report all confirmed cases or suspected cases.

PARENTS/GUARDIANS: Inform your child care provider if your child has this illness.

Prevention & Control

1. Nebraska state law requires that all children in a school based program be protected by age-appropriate immunization against pertussis, along with immunization against other diseases. The pertussis vaccine is given in combination with diphtheria and tetanus (DTaP or Tdap).
 - a. Ages 2 through 5 years enrolled in a school based program not licensed as a child care provider requires 4 doses of DTaP.
 - b. Students from Kindergarten through 12th Grade, including all transfer students from outside the State of Nebraska and any foreign students, requires 3 doses of DTaP.
 - c. At 7th grade (or any time after 10 or 11 years of age) 1 dose of Tdap is required.
2. Exposed children should be observed for symptoms of pertussis for 20 days after last contact. Symptomatic children with cough should be excluded from child care, and seek physician evaluation.
3. Diagnosis: To confirm a diagnosis of pertussis, laboratory tests are performed on material taken on a swab from the back of the nose and throat. Lab tests are less accurate when antibiotics have been given.

For more information, you or your physician may call the Central District Health Department at 385-5175, or your local health department.